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ABSTRACT

A study, part of a doctoral dissertation at Oklahoma State University, identified those clerical occupations that fall within the realm of the office assistant program. It also determined from employers major concerns and problems encountered in terms of employee performance in selected occupations. Phase I collected data from 22 instructors of Office Assistant Programs at area vocational schools in Oklahoma. The 22 occupations that were identified most often by the instructors as ones in which they provided training became the list of occupations of reference with the employers. The 77 employers were identified by instructors as hirers of graduates of their programs. Employers identified occupations for which they had positions, the one occupation that caused them the greatest concern, and specific skills and qualities of concern within that occupation. The secretarial occupation was indicated by employers as causing the greatest concern. Specific employer concerns were employees' grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary. Another major concern was time management. Basic skills and work attitudes were primary attributes sought by employers rather than new technology trends. Recommendations were that business educators should emphasize skills sought by employers and should generate occupational awareness of skills and qualities needed for success. (Survey instruments are appended.) (YLB)

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A STUDY OF THE OFFICE ASSISTANT PROGRAM IN OKLAHOMA

Executive Summary

By
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NOTE

This document is an executive summary of the doctoral dissertation produced by Barbara Grayson in December, 1983. The dissertation, which is the final report of this project, will be available through normal channels, i.e., through library loan from Oklahoma State University or on microfilm through Dissertation Abstracts.

The complete report is referenced:

Grayson, Barbara Ann. "A Study of the Office Assistant Program in Oklahoma." (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Oklahoma State University, 1983).

Statement of the Problem

Office employment is one area that has increased over the past 20 years and it is expected to increase continually through 1990 (American Vocational Association, 1981). The Standard Occupational Classification Manual lists a vast number of clerical occupations presently performed in the business sector. These two facts suggest that one program cannot adequately prepare competent and reliable workers for all the occupations listed.

In order to incorporate employer needs with curriculum content, input from employers in the area must be sought frequently. Thus, there is a continuing need to emend the information base available to those who plan, implement, and conduct vocational programs. It is also appropriate at some point to stop and reflect upon the occupations for which training can be accomplished within one specific program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was twofold: (1) to identify those clerical occupations that fall within the realm of the office assistant program, and (2) to identify from employers major concerns and problems encountered in terms of employee performance in selected occupations.

Procedures

The study was conducted in two phases. Phase I involved the collection of data from instructors of Office Assistant Programs at the area vocational schools in Oklahoma. Instructors were asked to select from a list of 168 clerical occupations those in which they

provided training. In addition, they were asked to list names and addresses of five employers who hired graduates of their programs. Appendix A is a display of the instrumentation for Phase I.

Phase II involved collection of data from the employers identified in Phase I. The instrument used in this phase requested employers to identify Office Assistant Program occupations used in their organization, the occupation which causes them the greatest concern, and specific skills and qualities of greatest concern within that occupation. The instrument used in Phase II lists the 22 occupations that were most often identified in Phase I and lists 24 skills and qualities identified from the literature. The instrument is displayed in Appendix B.

Phase I resulted in responses from 22 (47 percent) of the 47 Office Assistant Program instructors in area vocational-technical schools. A total of 77 employers was also identified by the teachers. Phase II resulted in responses from 46 (61 percent) of the 77 employers. Respondents were from diverse sizes and types of companies and agencies. Table I displays the employer respondents by position and by number of clerical employees in the company. Respondents from the smaller companies were most often the owner or manager and the respondents from the larger companies were most often personnel officers.

Results

Phase I was accomplished in order to identify those occupations for which training should be given in the Office Assistant Program and to identify a sample of employers. The 22 occupations which were

TABLE I

EMPLOYER RESPONDENTS BY NUMBER OF CLERICAL WORKERS

Respondent Title	Number of Clerical Employees 1-5	6-10	11-20	20-100	100 Plus	No Response	Total
Owner/Pres./Office Manager	9	3					12
V.Pres./Cashier/ Assoc. Supt.	1	2	2	3			8
Personal Manager/ Officer/Interviewer		2	1	5	10	1	19
Head Secretary/ Personnel Secretary	1		3				4
No Response				1	1	1	3
Total	11	7	6	9	11	2	46

most often identified by the instructors became the list of occupations of reference with the employers. Employers were asked to check each of the occupations for which they had positions. Table II lists the 22 occupations, the number of teachers teaching toward each occupation, and the number of employers who have that position in their organizational structure. Rankings of the occupations are also listed. A Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient of .69 was calculated which indicates a reasonably high agreement between the jobs teachers teach toward and the jobs used by employers.

Employers were also asked to report the one occupation which causes them the greatest concern. Only 35 of the 46 employers responded to that question and twelve, or over one-third, of the respondents selected the secretary occupation. The general clerk occupation had

TABLE II

OFFICE OCCUPATIONS TAUGHT IN OFFICE ASSISTANT PROGRAMS
AND USED BY EMPLOYER RESPONDENTS

Occupation	# of Teachers Teaching	Rank	# of Employers Using	Rank
Secretary	21	4.5	38	1
Receptionist	22	2	36	2
Clerk Typist	22	2	35	3
Typist	22	2	29	4
File Clerk I	20	7	28	5
Clerk, General	20	7	24	8
Bookkeeper I	18	10.5	24	8
Payroll Clerk	18	10.5	24	8
General Ledger Bookkeeper	15	16.5	24	8
Mail Clerk	15	16.5	24	8
Calculating Machine Operator	20	7	17	11
Office Helper	19	9	16	12.5
Photocopying Machine Operator	16	13	16	12.5
Adding Machine Operator	16	13	14	14.5
Information Clerk	14	20.5	14	14.5
Personnel Clerk	14	20.5	13	16
Correspondence Clerk	14	20.5	11	17
Transcribing Machine Operator	21	4.5	10	18
Billing Typist	15	16.5	9	19.5
Legal Secretary	14	20.5	9	19.5
Appointment Clerk	15	16.5	8	21
Stenographer	16	13	6	22

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient = .69

the second highest responce, however, only four employers selected that occupation. Table III displays the total response to that question.

TABLE III

OCCUPATIONS OF MAJOR CONCERN TO EMPLOYERS

Occupation	# of Employers	% of Respondents
Secretary	12	34.3
Clerk, General	4	11.4
Clerk Typist	3	8.6
Receptionist	2	5.7
File Clerk I	2	5.7
Bookkeeper I	2	5.7
Transcribing Machine Oper.	2	5.7
Typist	1	2.9
General Ledger Bookkeeper	1	2.9
Appointment Clerk	1	2.9
Mail Clerk	1	2.9
Correspondence Clerk	1	2.9
Office Helper	1	2.9
Information Clerk	1	2.9
Adding Machine Operator	1	2.9
No response	11	n/a

Employers were asked to identify the specific concerns they had about the occupation of greatest concern. Those eleven employers who had not expressed concern about a particular occupation did respond to this question and it was assumed that their concerns related to all of the occupations in general. The final report does list the

specific concerns by occupation, however, because of the small number expressing concerns with occupations other than secretary, only the responses regarding the secretary and the overall responses are displayed in this summary in Table IV.

Overall, 29 (63 percent) of the employers were concerned with clerical employees' grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary. Of those employers identifying secretary and the occupation of greatest concern, 9 (75 percent) had the same specific concern. Almost one-half of all employers and two-thirds of the employers with secretarial concerns were also concerned with time management. One-half of the employers with secretarial concerns listed writing skills as a specific concern. Other specific concerns were identified by less than one-third of the employers, however, 8 (66 percent) listed shorthand ability as a concern with secretaries.

Conclusions

1. The occupations reported by teachers are used by employers, although some were nto used as much as others. Secretaries, receptionists, clerk typists, typists, and file clerks are used more frequently by employers.

2. It is logical to conclude that employers encounter the greatest problems with the occupations they utilize the most. An agreement existed among employers reporting concerns with these occupations.

3. Basic skills and work attitudes appear to be primary attributes sought by employers rather than new technology trends. A precedence was evident with regard to grammar, punctuation, spelling,

TABLE IV

SPECIFIC EMPLOYER CONCERNS WITH SECRETARIES
AND WITH ALL OCCUPATIONS STUDIED

Type of concern	# of Employers w/secretarial concerns	# of Employers w/concerns overall	Overall Rank
Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary	9	29	1
Management of time	4	22	2
Writing skills	6	15	3.5
Initiative	2	15	3.5
Typing ability	3	13	5.5
Proofreading	5	13	5.5
Dependability	4	12	7
Oral communication	3	11	10.5
Shorthand ability	8	11	10.5
Punctuality	2	11	10.5
Emotional maturity	2	11	10.5
Good attendance	2	11	10.5
Ability to follow directions	2	11	10.5
Interest, enthusiasm	4	10	14
Neatness, quality of work	2	9	15
Ability to adapt to change	3	8	17
Cooperation	3	8	17
Math Skills	3	8	17
Proper use of reference materials	3	7	19
Honesty, responsibility	4	6	20
Dictation, transcribing ability	0	4	21.5
Reading skills	1	4	21.5
Job performance	1	3	23
Office machine skills	0	2	24
*Appearance	1	0	26
*Ability to get along w/employees	0	1	26
*Accuracy	0	1	26

*Concern added by respondent.

and vocabulary; writing skills; and initiative, as these three were ranked among the top five. Also ranked high among overall concerns of employers were management of time and typing ability.

4. An awareness of the knowledges, skills, and qualities sought by employers would enable teachers to better prepare their students for occupational success and job retention.

5. While grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary constitute the leading overall concern of employers, it cannot be considered as the dominant factor among all occupations. More time could be devoted to examining the characteristics related to various clerical occupations.

6. Students may realize greater success if they are given ample opportunities to apply office skills and qualities acquired during the learning process to actual conditions they are likely to experience in the business world.

7. A closer relationship between the business community and business educators might ensure that students are pursuing prerequisites that are essential to successful job performance.

Recommendations

1. Business educators should initiate classroom projects that encourage students to meet deadlines, establish priorities for office tasks, interact with others, use initiative, make decisions and be involved in activities that emphasize spelling, grammar, and other traits desired by employers.

2. Business educators should generate occupational awareness of the skills and qualities needed for success in various clerical occupations.

3. Businesses should be contacted frequently to ascertain new trends and procedures occurring in the business community.

4. The researcher suggests that furth research be conducted relative to the importance of training individuals who are capable of performing adequately in several occupations as opposed to preparation for a specific occupation.

5. Occupational requirements and procedures resulting from new technology were not identified by employers participating in this study. There are many possible reasons why they were not identified, e.g., (1) employers are using self-help packages to train personnel, (2) beginning employees are usually hired in entry level positions, (3) entry level employees may be well-trained on the latest equipment in their high school programs. It is our recommendation that research be conducted in this area.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF CLERICAL OCCUPATIONS

Name_____ School_____

The following occupational titles are listed in the Standard Occupational Classification Manual as jobs found in the clerical industry. Assuming that students enter your program with varying amounts of training in typing, shorthand, and bookkeeping, which of the following jobs fall appropriately in your Office Assistant Program? Please check each occupation for which you feel you can and should be training some student to a level of competence where the student could perform the tasks of that occupation in a business or industry. DO NOT INCLUDE occupations for which students would require additional formal training before they could perform the job.

Occupational Title	Occupational Title
_____Computer operator	_____Administrative clerk
_____Sorting-machine operator	_____Real-estate clerk
_____Computer-peripheral-equipment operator	_____Survey worker
_____Tabulating-machine operator	_____Reservation clerk
_____Auxiliary-equipment operator, data processing	_____Appointment clerk
_____Social Secretary	_____Information clerk
_____Legal Secretary	_____Receptionist
_____Secretary	_____Mortgage-closing clerk
_____Shorthand reporter	_____Space scheduler
_____Stenographer	_____Correspondence clerk
_____Stenotype operator	_____Correspondence review clerk
_____Transcribing machine operator	_____Sales correspondent
_____Clerk-typist	_____Order clerk
_____Typist	_____Employment clerk
_____Clerk, general	_____Identification clerk
	_____Insurance clerk II
	_____Personnel clerk

Occupational Title	Occupational Title
_____File clerk I	_____C.O.D. clerk
_____File clerk II	_____Traffic-rate clerk
_____Classification clerk	_____Foreign clerk
_____Coding clerk	_____Cost clerk
_____Data-examination clerk	_____Bookkeeping-machine operator I
_____Suggestion clerk	_____Bookkeeping-machine operator II
_____Return to factory clerk	_____Billing-machine operator
_____Sorter	_____Adding-machine operator
_____Programer, detail	_____Audit-machine operator
_____Insurance clerk I	_____Calculating-machine operator
_____Checker II	_____Duplicating-machine operator I
_____Audit clerk	_____Duplicating-machine operator II
_____Bookkeeper I	_____Offset-duplicating-machine operator
_____Bookkeeper II	_____Photocopying-machine operator
_____Classification-control clerk	_____Photographic-machine operator
_____General-ledger bookkeeper	_____Addressing-machine operator
_____Securities clerk	_____Folding-machine operator
_____Accounting clerk, data processing	_____Inserting-machine operator
_____Balance clerk	_____Sealing-and-canceling-machine operator
_____Timekeeper	_____Embossing-machine operator I
_____Payroll clerk, data processing	_____Embossing-machine operator II
_____Payroll clerk	_____Collator operator
_____Invoice-control clerk	_____Microfilm mounter
_____Billing typist	_____Bursting-machine tender

Occupational Title	Occupational Title
_____Coin wrapper	_____Personnel scheduler
_____Telephone operator	_____Material coordinator
_____Telegraphic-typewriter operator	_____Production coordinator
_____Direct-mail clerk	_____Reproduction order processor
_____Mail clerk	_____Control clerk, data processing II
_____Parcel-post clerk	_____Production clerk
_____Slot-tag inserter	_____Routing clerk
_____Deliverer, outside	_____Stock control clerk
_____Office helper	_____Film or tape librarian
_____Tube operator	_____Magazine keeper
_____Scheduler, maintenance	_____Parts clerk
_____Service clerk	_____Tool crib attendant
_____Dispatcher, maintenance service	_____Inventory clerk
_____Dispatcher, motor vehicle	_____Material clerk
_____Repair-order clerk	_____Stock clerk
_____Order detailer	_____Parts-order-and stock clerk
_____Control clerk, data processing I	_____Procurement clerk
_____Reconsignment clerk	_____Tallier
_____Shipping-order clerk	_____Shipping-and-receiving weigher
_____Traffic clerk	_____Checker I
_____Fuel-oil clerk	_____Receiving checker
_____Shipping and receiving clerk	_____Shipping checker
_____Distributing clerk	_____Test Technician
_____Route-delivery clerk	_____Industrial-order clerk
	_____Material expediter

Occupational Title

_____Job tracer

_____Expediter

_____Order caller

_____Laundry clerk

_____Lost-and-found clerk

_____Laboratory clerk

_____Router

_____Lost-charge-card clerk

_____Investigator

_____Customer-complaint clerk

_____Skip tracer

_____Pedigree tracer

_____Collection clerk

_____Collector

_____Repossessor

_____Terminal-system operator

_____Varitype operator

_____Cryptographic-machine operator

_____Data typist

_____Data coded operator

_____Keypunch operator

_____Magnetic-tape-typewriter operator

_____Perforator typist

_____Terminal operator

Occupational Title

_____Verifer operator

_____Compiler

_____Budget clerk

_____Statistical clerk

_____Chart clerk

_____Chart changer

_____Addresser

_____Tax clerk I

_____Credit authorizer

_____Repair order clerk

_____Charge account clerk

_____Credit clerk

_____Mortgage-accounting clerk

_____Balance clerk

_____Posting clerk

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!

EMPLOYER INFORMATION FORM

Please provide the names and addresses of five employers that hire graduates from your program.

1. Name of Business_____

   Address_____
   Street No. City State Zip Code

   Contact Person_____

   Title_____

2. Name of Business_____

   Address_____
   Street No. City State Zip Code

   Contact Person_____

   Title_____

3. Name of Business_____

   Address_____
   Street No. City State Zip Code

   Contact Person_____

   Title_____

4. Name of Business_____

   Address_____
   Street No. City State Zip Code

   Contact Person_____

   Title_____

5. Name of Business_____

   Address_____
   Street No. City State Zip Code

   Contact Person_____

   Title_____

APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF SELECTED EMPLOYERS

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Name of Business: _____

B. Number of clerical employees: _____

C. Title of person completing form: _____

II. CLERICAL OCCUPATIONS IDENTIFIED

Twenty-two occupational titles were most often identified by instructors of Office Assistance Programs at Area Vocational-Technical Schools, as jobs that fall within the range of their training program. Please place a check mark beside the one(s) that are used in your organization.

1. _____Clerk-typist
2. _____Typist
3. _____Receptionist
4. _____Secretary
5. _____Transcribing Machine operator
6. _____Clerk, general
7. _____File clerk I
8. _____Calculating Machine operator
9. _____Office helper
10. _____Bookkeeper I
11. _____Payroll clerk
12. _____Stenographer
13. _____Appointment clerk
14. _____Billing typist
15. _____Mail clerk
16. _____Adding Machine operator
17. _____Legal secretary
18. _____Information clerk
19. _____General-ledger bookkeeper
20. _____Correspondence clerk
21. _____Personnel clerk
22. _____Photocopying Machine operator

III. MAJOR CONCERNS

From the occupations you checked in Section II, please select the one occupation with which you have the greatest problem in terms of beginning employee performance and write it in the space provided below.

A. Occupation: _____

IV. OFFICE PERSONNEL CONCERNS

From a review of literature, employers identified the following areas as causes for concern among office workers. Please place a check mark beside the one(s) that present a problem for you. Space is provided below for any additions that you may have.

_____Grammar, punctuation, spelling & vocabulary	_____Dictation and transcribing ability
_____Shorthand ability	_____Typing ability
_____Management of time	_____Initiative
_____Punctuality	_____Dependability
_____Oral communication	_____Good attendance
_____Writing skills	_____Interest, enthusiasm
_____Job performance	_____Proofreading
_____Reading skills	_____Emotional maturity
_____Math skills	_____Neatness, quality of work
_____Cooperation	_____Honesty, responsibility
_____Office Machines skills	_____Ability to adapt to change
_____Proper use of reference materials	_____Ability to follow directions

Additions: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!